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SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: AMBASSADOR BOULWARE'S PARIS  
CONSULTATION (JANUARY 15)

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 14

Classified By: Andrew Young, Political Counselor, 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: U.S. Ambassador to Mauritania Mark Boulware met with French MFA officials on January 15, with discussions focusing on regional terrorism (lack of unity among regional actors) and the Mauritanian government's performance following the resolution of the long political crisis and elections (Aziz doing reasonably well although hampered by many long-standing problems). The French expressed general agreement with Ambassador Boulware's assessments and expressed interest in continuing close contact. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Ambassador to Mauritania Mark Boulware on January 15 met with MFA AF PDAS Olivier Chambard, AF/W DAS Laurent Bigot, and Sahel Desk Officer Marie Audouard. Embassy AF-Assistant also participated. The French were in a listening mode and sought Ambassador Boulware's views, beginning with the issue of regional terrorism. Ambassador Boulware said that attitudes and actions towards AQIM and the terrorist threat varied among Mauritania (relatively strong), Mali (more hesitant), and Niger (pre-occupied with President Tandja's bid to prolong his term in office). There often appeared to be no unity of approach. PDAS Chambard agreed on the lack of unity, noting that another problem, a lack of confidence, would plague efforts even if more unity developed. Chambard commented on the ambiguous role of Algeria, which should be among the most concerned, and regional distractions caused by, for example, Western Sahara and its effect on Morocco's attention to the broader region. Chambard expressed relief that France's security cooperation with Mauritania had continued through the political crisis, which meant that there was no need to restart suspended programs.

¶3. (C) DAS Bigot asked about Aziz's performance, post-election. Ambassador Boulware said that Aziz seemed to be trying his best, under difficult circumstances and because of continuing problems caused by the long political crisis. Given the circumstances, he said there was nothing specific for which Aziz deserved criticism. (NOTE: Our interlocutors' silence on this point suggested they agreed with Ambassador Boulware. END NOTE.) Ambassador Boulware said that many USG programs needed to be restarted, although security cooperation had not been stopped completely. Training had been suspended but other programs had continued. Ambassador Boulware said that the Aziz government seemed serious about fighting corruption in Mauritania.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Boulware highlighted the continuing problem of disaffected youth in Mauritania and the need for a social response to their problems. Desk Officer Audouard

mentioned the sometimes harmful effects caused by Islamic schools operating in Mauritania (and elsewhere) that enjoyed Saudi Arabian support. She commented on the sometimes divisive, sometimes unifying role that Islam played on countries such as Mauritania that were trying to balance modern and traditional forces in their societies.

¶5. (C) A final problem, one that reflected very poorly on Mauritania's justice and human rights systems, was the continued detention of Hanevy Ould Dahah, a journalist who had completed his announced prison sentence but who remained in GOM custody (reftel). Ambassador Boulware told the French that he had raised this case with Mauritanian authorities but received no firm assurances. The French agreed that this was a problematic case that Mauritania had never quite adequately explained, much less acted to resolve. Audouard said that the indigenous slavery problem also hurt Mauritania's image, although it was in a different category since it had roots in ancient traditions. All sides agreed that Mauritania's willingness to associate with Sudan's Bashir was also a legitimate cause for concern.

¶6. (C) In closing, the French expressed firm interest in continuing to consult on Mauritania and they were pleased that Ambassador Boulware had taken the time to meet with them. Ambassador Boulware shared these sentiments and invited continued close U.S.-France dialogue on Mauritania and the region, especially concerning security and terrorism.

¶7. (U) Ambassador Boulware has cleared this message.  
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